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AFGHANISTAN

SUCCESS STORY

Reaching Out to Women in Hilmand

Department of Women's Affairs empowers women through training in Hilmand Province



Photo: USAID/LGCD

Women in Gereshk learn tailoring and embroidery skills.

Two hundred women gained marketable skills in tailoring and food processing with support from USAID and the Afghan Government.

Women in Hilmand Province, located in Afghanistan's conservative south, live under extremely restrictive conditions. They rarely leave their homes and it is difficult for development activities to reach them. Nevertheless, the Department of Women's Affairs has played an active role in the province since 2002, maintaining women's centers in several locations that serve as the only resource centers where women can socialize, receive vocational training, and hold events.

In early 2010, USAID supported the department by refurbishing the women's centers in Gereshk, Nahri Sarraj, and Lashkar Gah districts. At subsequent meetings, women's advocates requested kitchen gardening vocational training in Lashkar Gah and tailoring and embroidery training in Gereshk.

With support from the local communities, USAID provided the desired training. The Lashkar Gah community contributed \$4,360 while the community in Gereshk contributed \$5,560, both in labor and materials, to support the training. In addition to providing the training location, Department of Women's Affairs Director Fawzia Ulumi monitored the training daily, as did her deputy in Gereshk, Gululi Shirzad. This involvement helped ensure a successful outcome despite the difficult operating environment.

The training workshops empowered nearly 200 illiterate women with marketable skills to establish income-generating businesses in food processing and tailoring. "I am very poor. Before this training, I had no skills," commented Miss Noorya, a Gereshk trainee. "Now I have learned basic tailoring. When I graduate, I will be able to start my own business at home and support my elderly father." Hilmand's representative in the Afghan National Parliament, Naseema Niazi, stated her gratitude for this support to women.

Visible government presence during these activities bolstered the legitimacy of the department's efforts and demonstrated the Afghan Government's willingness to invest in and support women in Hilmand.

As USAID's flagship stabilization effort, the Local Governance and Community Development project engages communities in unstable areas to take an active role in their own security and address priority grievances.